

# The new authoritarians

Through their U.S. front groups, Muslim radicals overtaking the Middle East have found support in the Obama administration

THE LAST TIME WE SAW one whole despotic region of the world come tumbling down we could name the heroes and the moments that propelled it:

An electrician named Lech Walesa, jumping a wall at the Gdansk shipyard. Boris Yeltsin atop a tank in front of the Russian White House, defying the Communist old guard in 1991. Pastor Laszlo Tokes, refusing an eviction notice from his Romanian flat as crowds of demonstrators gathered. A playwright named Vaclav Havel before a joint session of Congress, giving in Czech a speech quoting the Declaration of Independence.

These men weren't perfect, but they performed brave deeds at pivotal moments in history. They helped Westerners find common ground with a part of the world blocked from view until the fall of the Berlin Wall behind strange languages, customs, and a muffled history.

Now 15 months after the Middle East revolutions began, where are the Arab Spring heroes?

Egyptian intellectual Essam Abdallah has a provocative reason why no democracy heroes have emerged: The U.S. Islamist lobbies with an ear at the White House have ensured that there aren't any.

"The most dramatic oppression of the region's civil societies and the Arab Spring is not by means of weapons, or in the Middle East. It is not led by Gaddafi, Mubarak, Bin Ali, Saleh, or Assad. It is led by the powerful Islamist lobbies in Washington, D.C.," writes Abdallah, a professor at Ain Shams University in Egypt who writes for the pan-Arab publication *Elaph*.

Abdallah says that months into the Arab Spring, he and other Egyptian freedom fighters realized that "the Western powers, and the Obama Administration have put their support behind the new authoritarians."

Through their proxies in the United States, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Nahda of Tunisia, the Justice Party of Morocco, and the Islamist militias in Libya's Transitional National Council systematically received U.S. support, writes Abdallah, "at the expense of real liberal and secular forces." He says the proxies include Dalia Mogahed, the president's advisor on Muslim affairs and member of the President's Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; John Esposito, professor of International Affairs and Islamic

Studies at Georgetown University; and lobbyists for CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations), the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and the Islamic Society of North America.

"This bloc of regimes and organizations is now becoming the greatest Islamist radical lobby ever to penetrate and infiltrate the White House, Congress, the State Department and the main decision making centers of the U.S. government."

As if to prove Abdallah's point, FBI director Robert Mueller met on Feb. 8 with a number of these very groups to acknowledge that the largest law enforcement agency in the country—under unpublished directives from Attorney General Eric Holder—has removed more than 1,000 presentations on Islam from FBI training deemed "offensive" and "racist" by the groups, including use of the terms "radical Islam" and "jihad."

Last month also the New York Police Department, under relentless pressure from CAIR, dropped showing a documentary called *The Third Jihad* in its counter-terrorism training program.

If you trace the overthrows in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and perhaps coming in Syria, you will find moments of early individual determination (Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, Wael Ghonim in Cairo) swiftly engulfed by the violence and chaos of Muslim extremists hiding less and less behind more secular freedom fighters. And you will also find White House silence in the early moments that mattered. In Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria it was not until the revolutions turned Islamist and extremist (one signal: when Muslim mobs attacked Christians and their churches) that President Obama stepped in, sided with the mob, and called for regime ouster.

And in what remains one of the largest popular uprisings in the Muslim world, Iran's Green Revolution of 2009, Obama never called for regime overthrow. Coincidentally enough, the streets remained in the hands of an organized and legitimate opposition (that Obama at one point said "may not be as different as advertised" from those in power)—that is, until the army of the ayatollahs brutally shut them down.

When the dust has settled and the history is written, we who should be recounting heroes' tales will have a tale of complicity to account for instead. ®